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# POLICY MATTERS OHIO

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LINK: <http://www.policymattersohio.org/WhoTakesCredit2010.htm>

## **Free tax preparation organizations serve more Cuyahoga County and Ohio families in 2010 than ever before**

More working families in Cuyahoga County and Ohio received free tax preparation at volunteer income tax assistance (VITA) sites in 2010 than in any previous year, according to a new report from Policy Matters Ohio. The Cuyahoga EITC Coalition filed more than 8,000 tax returns on behalf of low- and moderate-income families, returning more than \$11 million to working families.

Nearly 30 percent of the filers served in Cuyahoga County qualified for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which can be worth up to \$5,600 for married families with three children. The EITC is heralded as the largest and most successful poverty relief program in the country.

“When you file free, you keep all of your refund,” said David Rothstein, researcher and report author at Policy Matters Ohio. “With direct deposit and e-file available through the Coalition, many filers can get their return in a week.”

One of the newest trends for EITC and free tax recipients is the need for different public assistance programs including food, unemployment, and housing help. Working families claimed these benefits at a 25 percent higher take-up rate than last year, according to the report.

“Working families who have never been eligible for the EITC and public benefits now find themselves in need,” said Rothstein.

The report details successful marketing strategies such as radio advertisements and having a universal, three-digit phone referral number for clients. The report also discusses integrating financial services and asset building for clients. While most clients are “banked,” impediments such as inconsistent or low income remain impediments for saving. The report concludes with some marketing and outreach strategies for the Coalition to improve.

Interested families making \$49,000 or less a year should call 211, First Call for Help for an appointment to get their taxes prepared for free. Free tax sites include Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Ohio Benefit Bank locations.

